

down and split it for firewood. The incident created considerable sensation, for it marked the set of the Lollard stream. The heretics became more and more outspoken in their attacks on the common objects of superstition. The chronicler of St. Mary's Abbey, Leicester, tells us with horror how they called images * idols,' and how ^s St. Mary of Lincoln ' became in their language * the witch of Lincoln.* * When all our fathers worshipped stocks and stones,' the cult of polytheism centred on particular shrines. As the Switzer of the forest cantons regards the Black Virgin of Einsiedeln, as the Neapolitan regards the Blood of St. Januarius, so the Englishman regarded the Virgin of Walsingham and the bones of St. Thomas of Canterbury. The Lollards denied the sanctity of such places, and attempted to arouse scorn against the local ' Maries.' The Church vigorously defended her strongholds. As time went on, the chief matter in dispute, next to the nature of the Host, was the value to popular religion of saints, images, and shrines.¹

The new party held firmly together. Individual eccentricity had little place among the preachers, who could be easily recognised by their long russet-coloured gowns with deep pockets, their peculiar speech interlarded with phrases of Scripture, the sanctity of their demeanour, their habit of basing every argument on some injunction found in * God's Law,' and their abhorrence of the common oaths of the day, for which they substituted * I am sure,' * It is sooth,' ' Without doubt it is so.' The clergy of the neighbourhood noted with alarm how they resembled each other in manners, language and doctrine, and how with unity came strength. They preached no doctrines subversive of order or hostile to lay property ; on the contrary, they cultivated the friendship not only of the wealthy citizens, but of the knights and gentry. Sir Thomas Latimer, a powerful local magnate, could welcome them to a score of manor-houses scattered over Northamptonshire and Leicestershire. Smaller landholders, such as John Trussel, who possessed only the single manor of Gayton, gave them countenance when they came on their rounds. This patronage was of the utmost

¹ Knighton, ii. 182-3, 313.